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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DAMASCUS 003851

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/05/2016

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SUBJECT: TFLE01: SYRIA DAILY SITREP 17 FOR SUNDAY AUGUST 6,  
2006

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Michael H. Corbin for Reasons 1.4 b and d

11. (S) Summary: Syrian Information Minister Mohsen Bilal called the August 4 al-Qaa strike that killed 26 Syrians "a racist, fascist and terrorist act committed with American weapons." The Syrian Foreign Minister on August 5 sent two letters regarding the al-Qaa killings to the UN SYG and the head of the UN Security Council, calling for an immediate and unconditional cease-fire and Israeli withdrawal beyond the Blue Line. (Note: The SARG has not shown any indication of exploiting this event domestically to provoke demonstrations.) Arab League SYG Amre Mousa arrived in Damascus on August 5 for an official two-day visit with SARG officials in advance of the emergency meeting of Arab foreign ministers to be held in Beirut on August 7. Syrian military units remain non-provocative and in survivability positions. The Consular section received 85 walk-in requests for ACS services on August 3, approximately the same number as the previous business day. End Summary.

Political/Military

12. (U) The following are political updates:

-- An Israeli air strike on the Lebanese village of al-Qaa on August 4 killed 33 farm workers, including 26 Syrians. Media contacts report that most of the dead were Syrian Kurds from poor villages in northern Syria. Draped in Syrian flags, the 26 Syrians, including six women, were buried in the village of Jandareez, near the Turkish border, on the orders of Syrian President Bashar al-Asad. Syria's Grand Mufti, senior Christian clerics and SARG officials attended the funeral. Information Minister Bilal told Syrian television: "This new massacre is a racist, fascist and terrorist act committed with American weapons." Syrian PM Mohammed Naji Otri received a telephone call on August 5 from Lebanese Prime Minister, Fouad Sinoura, expressing the latter's condolences for the Syrian deaths in al-Qaa. As of August 6, Embassy is unaware of any demonstrations protesting the Syrian deaths.

-- The Syrian Foreign Ministry on August 5 sent two identical letters regarding the events in al-Qaa to the UN SYG and the head of the UN Security Council, calling for an immediate and unconditional cease-fire and Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon to beyond the Blue Line.

-- The Arab League SYG Amre Mousa arrived in Damascus on August 5 for a two-day official visit to discuss developments

in Lebanon and coordinate arrangements for the emergency meeting of Arab foreign ministers to be held in Beirut on August 7. Syrian official media reported that Mousa met with President Asad on August 5 about efforts to reach a cease-fire.

-- Asad spoke with Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad by phone on the night of August 5 about continued Israeli military action in Lebanon and the means by which to support Lebanon, according to the official Syrian Arab News Agency (SANA).

-- Syrian FM Walid Mu'allim received phone calls on August 4 from Turkish FM Abdullah Gul and Italian FM Massimo d'Alema about the international community's efforts to reach a cease-fire and Syria's position that Israel must withdraw beyond the Blue Line in southern Lebanon, according to SANA.

-- Syria's Information Minister Bilal met on August 4 with American professor Franklin Lamb from Americans Concerned for Middle East Peace, according to official Syrian media. Lamb also met with NGOs as well in Syria, including briefly with the ICRC, before traveling to Lebanon, but did not seek a meeting with the Embassy.

#### Military

13. (S) The following are military updates:

-- DAO reports that Syrian military units remain non-provocative and in survivability positions. Syrian units are placing low-priority vehicles in easily identifiable locations, possibly as part of a deception campaign to draw attention and fire away from combat systems located elsewhere.

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#### Consular

14. (U) The following are consular updates:

-- The Consular section received 85 walk-in requests for ACS services on August 3, approximately the same number as the 90 inquiries on the previous business day.

#### Economic

15. (U) The following are economic updates:

-- The Syrian Minister of Social Affairs and Labor estimates that as of August 2 there were approximately 180,000 displaced Lebanese in Syria, with some 67,000 of them located in makeshift government shelters such as schools and camps, and the rest staying with host families or in hotels and apartments. In addition, UNHCR estimates a continuing daily net influx of 5,000-8,000 refugees into Syria from Lebanon, but noted that a number of males are returning to Lebanon for "family matters", according to the UN Office for the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs.

-- Contributions to private initiatives and the SARG-sponsored campaign to collect humanitarian assistance for displaced Lebanese continue unregulated and uncontrolled, in violation of SARG laws banning cash donations.

-- Seven planes from other Arab countries and Pakistan landed in Lattakia on August 4-5, carrying humanitarian aid for displaced Lebanese in Lebanon and Syria. Closure of the Beirut-Tripoli road will likely complicate efforts to deliver this aid to Lebanon.

CORBIN